DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 514 CG 027 041

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TITLE	Delivery of Career Counseling Services: Community Access--The Role of Employers: ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.; Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, Ottawa (Ontario).
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CG-95-74
PUB DATE	1995-00-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002004
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Canadian Studies; Career Awareness; *Career Counseling; *Career Development; Career Education; Career Guidance; Careers; *Cooperative Education; Education Work Relationship; *Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *Prevocational Education; *School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Student Development; Vocational Education; Vocational Interests
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Despite professional counseling and courses on career choice in school, students say they are poorly prepared to meet society's challenges. This digest looks at a career counseling initiative in Canada that unites the academic world and the workplace. Clearer ties must be established between education and the workplace; in the collaboration-based, educational approach described here, employers play a central role. However, even if an employer's commitment to education is strong, the rules of the game must be spelled out at the beginning if a real partnership is to be established. It is important to set up a council made up of representatives of the various partners to oversee the partnership. It is necessary to define objectives together, to reach consensus on the common goals, and to name someone credible to manage the project. The project described here addressed two key issues: (1) developing an education resource database, and (2) giving pedagogical support to work-related educational resource experiments. Employers showed enthusiasm for the project and participating educators were happy with the collaboration and appreciated the information in the database. Furthermore, students seemed happy with the curriculum changes and showed greater interest in the classroom. (RJM)

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Delivery of Career Counseling Services: Community Access--The Role of Employers: ERIC Digest.

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by Denis Marceau and Marcelle Gingras

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

1995 EDO-CG-95-74

Delivery of Career Counseling Services: Community Access - The Role of Employers

Denis Marceau and Marcelle Gingras

Overview

Canadian society is beset with major problems which are particularly visible among our youth: the high-school dropout rate is over 35%, many students are undecided about careers, and youth have the highest unemployment rate, at about 13%. Governments, educators, employers, and the public realize that young people are not sufficiently prepared for the workplace. This lack of preparation has major economic, social, and political impacts.

Despite professional counseling and courses on career choice in our schools, students say they are poorly prepared to meet the challenges in society. They report lacking information about the workplace, not understanding the link between academic subjects and the requirements of work, not seeing the relevance of what they are learning, and lacking academic motivation (Dupont, Gingras, & Marceau, 1992). New educational strategies are needed to help these young people.

Career Education

Career education is based on two fundamental principles: infusion (maintaining a career emphasis throughout the curriculum) and collaboration (making education a joint effort between the community and the educational system). The aim is to facilitate adaptation into professional society. Career education skills include basic academics (reading, oral and written communication, mathematics), productive work habits, work values, decision-making, job-seeking and job-holding skills, skills for understanding self and educational/occupational opportunities, skills for combating stereotyping (and other factors that reduce freedom of educational and occupational choice), skills required to humanize the workplace, and skills required to make meaningful use of leisure time (Dupont & Gingras, 1990; Hoyt, 1978; Wittorski, 1994). Overall, these initiatives help prepare students for the workplace by creating strong ties between the world of education and the world of work. Collaboration thus becomes an essential element in these programs.

Partnerships

In order to benefit all partners, collaboration must satisfy certain conditions (Blair, Brounstein, Hatry, & Morley, 1990; Landry, 1993):

- mutually clear, shared needs and objectives.
- freedom to participate by all players
- respective roles must be identified and accepted by all
- strong leadership by credible people capable of man aging the collaboration
- adequate human and material resources
- an efficient, flexible organization representing all partners (teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and employers) in a relationship between equals
- clear, well-planned, organized interventions

A study of employers, teachers, school principals, guidance counselors, and parents in the Eastern Townships of Quebec (Dupont & Mialaret, 1990) revealed that educators, parents, and representatives of the business-industry-labor community agree that all parties must be committed to preparing young people for the workplace. Employers indicated they were ready to commit themselves to collaboration between the workplace and education, and that the collaboration could take many forms: (a) on-the-job training; (b) informing educators and students about their expectations for workers; (c) facilitating tours of the workplace to allow students to observe workers at work; (d) collaborating in teacher training to ensure adequate knowledge of the workplace and of vocational requirements; (e) supplying students educators, and parents with brochures, posters, and audio-visual material on their businesses; (f) participating actively in career-days, promoting co-operative learning programs, and unpaid work experience, and talking and meeting with students in school; (g) conducting information sessions for teachers and guidance counselors on subjects like the job market and work-related problems; (h) financial support; (i) lending of tools and machinery; (j) tutorials; (k) adopt-a-school.

Course Of Action

Building on the concept of career education and the results of many studies, the Centre de recherche sur

l'éducation au travail (CRET) (Centre for Research on Education at Work) at the University of Sherbrooke recently developed a pilot project on partnerships between the academic world and the workplace. The project has two parts:

1. Developing an education resource database, set up by business, for schools and services in the Eastern Townships;

2. Giving pedagogical support to work-related educational resource experiments.

One resource database (Marceau & Gingras, 1993), lists 300 businesses, organizations, and associations available for talks, industrial tours, meetings with young people or adults, short-term on-the-job observation sessions, written or audio-visual documentation production, or any other type of informational activity. The database's basic goals include encouraging community participation in career education; coordinating workplace resources to help organize vocational guidance and professional placement activities; offering new activities and methods for exploration leading to a wider understanding of the workplace; helping organizations better understand educational practices and making known to educators businesses' training expectations.

The pedagogical support consists of supplying educators with the necessary framework to use the resource database. Some of the assistance given to teachers entails explaining how to integrate workplace concepts into educational activities; helping develop educational strategies using resources in the database; advising on the implementation of these strategies; and, helping to assess the impact of career education.

At the present time, employers are showing great enthusiasm for the project. Participating educators are happy with the collaboration and appreciate the information in the database, even if they must sometimes alter their educational practices to incorporate the resources. Students seem happy with the curriculum changes and show greater interest in the classroom, especially when workplace representatives are present.

Summary And Conclusion

To better prepare young people for the workplace, clearer ties must be established between education and the workplace. In the collaboration-based, educational approach of the project described in this paper, employers play a central role. However, even if employers' commitment to the education process is strong, the rules of the game must be spelled out at the beginning if a real partnership is to be established. It is important to set up a council made up of representatives of the various partners to oversee the partnership. It is necessary to define objectives together, to reach consensus on the common goals, and to name someone credible to manage the project. Finally, a tool like an employer database, and eventually an employee database, is indispensable both for the information supplied and for the time saved by the players.

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